The Clerks’ Advisory Group

Gillian Allcroft reports on the first meeting of NGA’s new group for clerks

Over 40 clerks from across the country made the trip to our headquarters in Birmingham during February half term. NGA arranged the meeting with three key purposes in mind:

• to determine what issues NGA should focus on in its Clerking Matters 2016 campaign
• to give clerks the opportunity to discuss issues and share good practice
• to identify what else NGA can do to help clerks carry out their work

In the first session we asked attendees around their tables to discuss and identify the key issues which affected their work. Not surprisingly a whole raft of topics were raised and the following five were chosen for further discussion:

1 a national association for clerks
2 qualifications and professional development
3 remuneration
4 access to information
5 independence of the role

The first of these threw up several possibilities as to how this could operate. Would such an association be entirely independent or would it be a special interest group of NGA, rather like our existing Special Schools Advisory Group? If it was an independent standalone body, how would it be funded and who would run it?

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NGA is meeting a small group of clerks in early April to discuss this further. Even if clerks decide to set up an independent body, we will continue to hold meetings of our advisory group as we value the input for our work.

Qualifications and professional development

Those in attendance generally welcomed the fact that the government had made money available to fund the Clerks’ Development Programme under the auspices of the National College for Teaching and Leadership. However, there was a mixed view on how relevant and useful the programme had been. Some felt that by trying to offer something for both new and experienced clerks the programme had not entirely succeeded for either group and this was compounded by variance in delivery.

There was some enthusiasm for accredited training/qualifications. Some attendees referenced the national accreditation scheme run by Hampshire Governor Services and said that an accreditation scheme provided concrete evidence of what the clerk could do. There was a feeling that unless there was a proper accreditation route for school clerks, the profession would not be taken seriously.

The debate about qualifications and training naturally filtered into a discussion about pay. Governing body clerks are not generally paid well in comparison with clerking roles in other sectors and some of those present felt that this was partly to do with a lack of accreditation and professionalisation of the role. There was also a discussion about the way in which clerks were sometimes paid at a lower rate for clerking committees – the consensus was that the rate should be the same, as in some cases the work for committees was more technical.

It was also noted that many clerks had suffered as a result of equal pay reviews when their role was considered to be less demanding than the reality. The importance of the role description was highlighted – NGA’s is on our website.

New survey

In our survey of clerks following the launch of Clerking Matters in 2013, NGA asked some questions about remuneration, but unfortunately the information collected was not nuanced enough to make proper comparisons.

We will be carrying out a further survey of clerks in which remuneration will be the main topic and will publish the results at our summer conference on 18 June in Birmingham.

Finally, discussions covered issues around the need to be able to stay independent, regardless of how the clerk was employed – via the local authority or other contracted service, independently or in another role in the school.

NGA felt that the day had been a great success and certainly succeeded in giving us food for thought and ideas for reinvigorating Clerking Matters. We would like to thank all the clerks who attended for their contributions and very much hope they will join us for the next meeting.

Gillian Allcroft is NGA’s deputy chief executive